

THE WATER BABIES

Retold for younger readers from the story

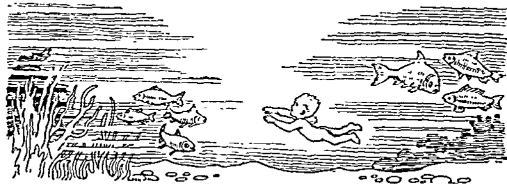
by

CHARLES KINGSLEY



EARLY READER SERIES NO. 27





Once upon a time there was a little chimney-sweep and his name was Tom. That is a short name, and you have heard it before, so you will not have much trouble in remembering it. He lived in a big town in the North where there were plenty of chimneys to sweep and plenty of money for Tom to earn and his master to spend.

Tom could not read nor write and he never washed. He had never been taught to say his prayers and he had never heard of God. He cried half the time and laughed the other half. He cried when he had to climb the dark flues, rubbing his poor knees and elbows raw, and when the soot got into his eyes, and when he had not enough to eat. But he laughed when he was tossing pennies with the other boys or playing leapfrog or throwing stones at horses' legs, which last was excellent fun if there was a wall to hide behind.

One day a smart groom rode into the alley where Tom lived. Tom was just about to heave half a brick at the horse's legs when the groom saw him and asked where Mr. Grimes the chimney-sweep lived.

Now Mr. Grimes was Tom's master. Tom was a wise boy

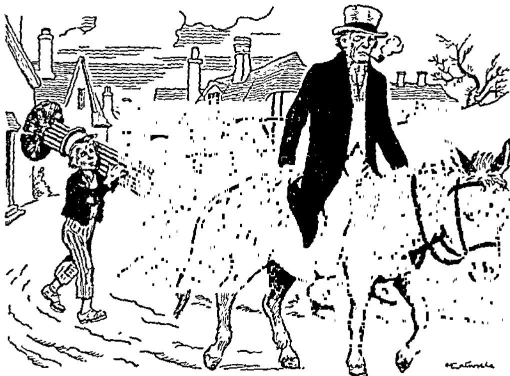
and was always very very polite to customers. So he put the half-brick down and listened. Mr. Grimes was to go next morning to Sir John Harthover's house where the chimneys needed sweeping.

When Tom told his master, Mr. Grimes was so delighted at having a new customer that he knocked Tom down then and there and drank more beer that night than he usually did in two, in order to be sure of getting up in time next morning. For the more a man's head aches when he wakes up the more glad he is to turn out for a breath of fresh air. When they got up at four the next morning he knocked Tom down again in order to teach him that he must be an extra good boy that day.

Harthover House was a really grand place with a park full of deer, which Tom believed to be monsters who were in the habit of eating children. There were miles of game-preserves in which Mr. Grimes and the collier lads poached at times, and a noble salmon river in which Mr. Grimes and his friends would have liked to poach; but that meant getting into the cold water and they didn't like that at all.

As I said, Harthover House was a grand place and Sir John was a grand old man whom even Mr. Grimes respected; for not only could he send Mr. Grimes to prison if he deserved it, as he did once or twice every week, but what was more he weighed fully fifteen stone and could have thrashed Mr. Grimes himself in fair fight which very few folk could do.

So Mr. Grimes and Tom set out at four that morning. Grimes rode the donkey in front and Tom with the brushes walked behind; out of the alley and up the street, past the closed window



Grimes rode the donkey and Tom with the brushes walked behind

shutters and the winking weary policemen and the roofs all shining grey in the grey dawn.

On and on they went and Tom looked and looked, for he had never walked so far into the country before. He longed to climb over a gate and pick buttercups and look for birds' nests in the hedge, but of course he dared not for fear of Mr. Grimes.

Soon they came up with a poor Irishwoman, trudging along with a bundle on her back. She had a grey shawl over her head and a crimson petticoat. She had neither shoes nor stockings and limped along as if she were tired and footsore. But she was a tall and handsome woman with bright grey eyes and fine black

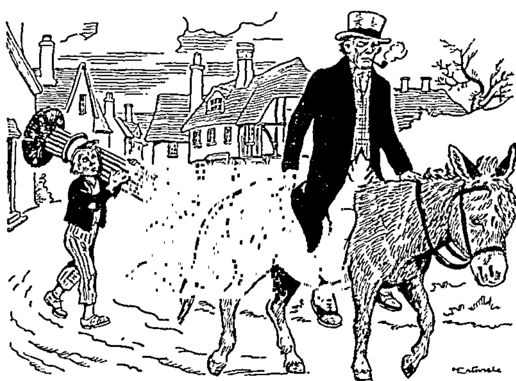
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She walked beside Tom and talked to him

hair. She took Mr. Grimes's fancy so much that he called out to her:

'Will you come up, lass, and ride behind me?'

Perhaps she did not admire Mr. Grimes's look and voice, for she answered quietly:

'No, thank you. I'd sooner walk with your little boy here.'

'Please yourself,' Grimes growled, and went on smoking.

So she walked beside Tom and talked to him and asked him where he lived, and all about himself, until Tom thought he'd never met such a nice woman. She asked him whether he said

his prayers, and seemed sad when he told her he knew no prayers to say.

Then he asked her where she lived, and she said far away by the sea. And Tom asked her about the sea, and she told him how it rolled and roared over the rocks in winter nights and lay still in the bright summer days for the children to bathe and play in.

At last, at the bottom of a hill, they came to a spring, and there Grimes stopped. Without a word he got off his donkey and began dipping his ugly head into the spring—and very dirty he made it.

Tom was picking flowers as fast as he could. The Irishwoman helped him. But when Tom saw Grimes actually washing himself he stopped, quite astonished, and said:

'Why, master, I never saw you do that before.'

'Nor will again, most likely,' said Grimes. ''Twasn't for cleanliness I did it, but for coolness. I'd be ashamed to want washing every week or so, like any smutty collier lad.'

Tom, too, wanted to dip his head into the spring, but Grimes made a dash at him with horrid words. Grimes was sulky because the woman preferred Tom's company to his, and he began to beat him. But Tom was used to that and kicked his master's shins with all his might.

'Are you not ashamed of yourself, Thomas Grimes?' cried the Irishwoman.

Grimes looked up, startled at her knowing his name, but all he answered was: 'No, nor never was yet,' and he went on beating Tom.

'True,' she said. 'For if you ever had been ashamed of yourself you would have gone over to Vendale long ago.'

'What do you know about Vendale?' Grimes shouted, but he stopped beating Tom. 'Who are you?'

'Never mind who I am. But if you strike that boy again . .'

Grimes seemed quite cowed and he got on to his donkey again without another word.

'I have one more thing to say to you both,' said the Irishwoman, 'for you will see me again before all is over. Those that wish to be clean, clean they will be. And those that wish to be foul, foul they will be. Remember.'

And she turned away through a gate into the meadow. When Grimes rushed after her she had disappeared. Grimes was silent as a post, for he was a little frightened.

When they had gone three miles more they came to Sir John's lodge gates. The keeper met them and together they walked up a great lime avenue a full mile long. Tom had never seen such enormous trees and as he looked up he thought that the blue sky rested on their heads. But he was puzzled by a strange murmuring sound which followed them all the way.

At last he took courage and asked the keeper what it was. He spoke very civilly to the keeper, for he was horribly afraid of him, and called him Sir. This pleased the keeper, who told him that it was the bees in the lime flowers.

'What are bees?' Tom asked.

'They make honey,' the keeper said.

'What is honey?'

'You hold your tongue,' Grimes shouted.

'Let the boy be,' said the keeper. 'He's a polite boy, and that's more than he'll be for long if he stays with you.'

Grimes laughed, for he took that as a compliment.

At last they reached the great house where the housekeeper took them into a big room all covered up with sheets of brown paper and told them to begin. After a whimper or two and a kick from his master, into the grate Tom went and up the chimney, while a housemaid stayed in the room to keep an eye on the furniture.

How many chimneys Tom swept I cannot say, but he swept so many that he got very tired and puzzled too, for they were old and crooked and Tom lost his way in them. When at last he came down again he came down the wrong chimney and found himself standing on the hearthrug in a room the like of which he had never seen before.

The room was all dressed in white—white window curtains, white furniture, white walls. There were pictures in gilt frames of horses and dogs and ladies and gentlemen. The two pictures which he liked best were one of a man in a long garment with little children and their mothers around him. He was laying his hand upon the children's heads, and the other picture was of the same man nailed to a cross. 'Poor man,' Tom thought. 'He looks so kind and quiet.'

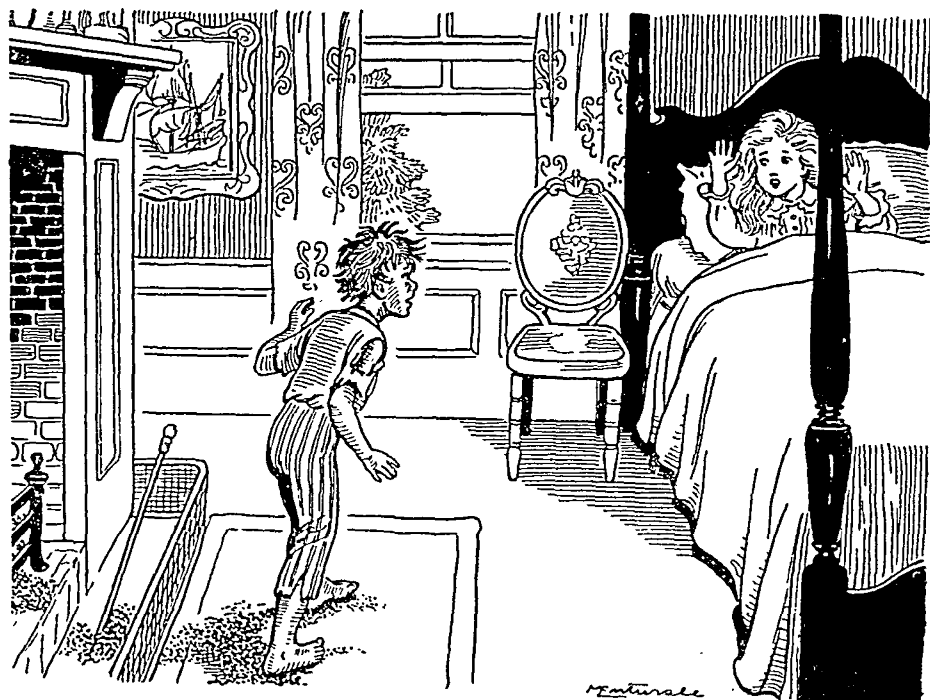
Then he looked towards the bed and held his breath with amazement. Under the snow-white coverlet lay the most beautiful little girl Tom had ever seen. Her hair was like threads of gold and he wondered if she could be a real live person or an

angel out of heaven. And he looked at his own dirty hands and tried to rub the soot off.

He looked round and suddenly saw, standing close to him, a little ugly, black, ragged figure with bleary eyes and grinning white teeth. He turned on it angrily, but it was only himself, reflected in a huge mirror!

And Tom, for the first time in his life, found out that he was dirty. He burst into tears of shame and anger and turned to sneak up the chimney again to hide.

Up jumped the little lady and, seeing Tom, she screamed. In rushed her nurse from the next room. When she saw Tom



Up jumped the little lady and, seeing Tom, she screamed

she thought he had come to steal. She ran at him and caught him by the jacket.

But she couldn't hold him. Tom doubled under her arm and was out of the window in a moment. Under the window spread a tree and down the tree went Tom like a cat, across the garden lawn and over the iron railings, leaving the old nurse at the window shouting fire and murder.

The gardener who was mowing saw Tom. He dropped his scythe and gave chase. The dairymaid heard the noise, knocked over the churn spilling all the cream, and gave chase. Grimes upset his sack of soot and gave chase to poor Tom. The ploughman left his horses and gave chase to Tom. The keeper, who was taking a rabbit out of a trap, let the rabbit go but gave chase to Tom. Sir John looked out of his study window (for he was an early rising old gentleman) and gave chase to Tom. The Irishwoman threw away her bundle and also gave chase to Tom.

In a word, never was there heard at Harthover House such a noise, row, hubbub and shindy as that day, when Grimes, the gardener, the dairymaid, the keeper, Sir John and the Irishwoman all ran up the park shouting: 'Stop thief!' in the belief that Tom had at least a thousand pounds' worth of jewels in his empty pockets.

Tom made for the woods. He had never been in a wood before and he found it a very different sort of place from what he had imagined. The boughs laid hold of his legs and arms, poked him in the face and in the stomach and made him shut his eyes. The long grass tumbled him over and cut his poor little fingers.

How to get out was the problem, but finally he ran his head against a wall. It hurt his head, but Tom was brave and did not mind that. Up the wall he went and over it like a squirrel.

And there he was out on the great grouse moors — heather and bog and rock stretching away up to the very sky. He doubled back and ran along under the wall for nearly half a mile. Only the Irishwoman saw which way he went and followed him.

Tom crossed the moor where he saw spiders and lizards, brown and grey and green, and thought they were snakes which would sting him. But they were as frightened as he was and shot away into the grass.



Up the wall he went and over it like a squirrel

Tom ran on and on, he hardly knew why; but he liked the great, wide, strange place and the cool, fresh air. What would he have said if he had seen, walking over the moor behind him, the very same Irishwoman who had taken his part on the road? But she kept out of sight behind the rocks and he never saw her, though she saw him.

Tom began to get hungry and very thirsty, for he had run a long way and the sun had risen high in the sky. He could see nothing to eat anywhere, and still less to drink. He thought: 'What a big place the world is!'

He came to the top of a mountain and far beneath him lay a deep green, rocky valley and a clear stream glinting in the sunlight. He heard a church bell ring and saw beneath him the roof of a little cottage. There was a tiny little red thing moving in the cottage garden, no bigger than a fly. As Tom looked down he saw it was a woman in a red skirt! Perhaps she would give him something to eat. So he climbed down, though he was very tired and thirsty. The church bells rang so loud he began to think they must be inside his own head. The river tinkled far below, and this is the song which it sang:

Clear and cool, clear and cool,
By laughing shallow, and dreaming pool,
Cool and clear, cool and clear,
By shining shingle, and foaming weir;
Under the crag where the ouzel sings,
And the ivied wall where the church-bell rings,
Undefiled, for the undefiled;
Play by me, bathe in me, mother and child.

So Tom went down. And all the time he never saw the Irishwoman coming down behind him.

* * * * *

The name of the village was Vendale and Tom was terribly tired and hot before he reached it. The perspiration ran out of the ends of his fingers and toes and washed him cleaner than he had been for a whole year. Finally he stumbled over a low wall and into a narrow road and up to the cottage door.

He came slowly up to the open door, which was hung round with roses, and peeped in, half afraid. There before him sat the nicest old woman that ever was seen. She was the school-teacher. At her feet sat the grandfather of all the cats in the world and around her, on benches, twelve or fourteen neat, rosy, chubby little children learning their lessons.

The children stared at Tom's dirty black face. The girls began to cry and the boys to laugh and all of them pointed at him rudely, but Tom was too tired to care.

'Water,' he said, too faint to say anything more.

The old woman looked at him through her spectacles for a minute and said: 'He's sick — and a little boy is a little boy — chimney-sweep or not.' And she gave him milk to drink and asked him where he'd come from.

Tom had no heart to think of a story and told the truth in a few words.

'Is it Sunday?' he asked.



The children stared at Tom's dirty black face

'No. Why should it be?'

'Because I hear the church bells ringing.'

She knew then that he was ill and delirious, and she took him to an outhouse where there was soft sweet hay and an old rug to lie on, but Tom could not sleep.

Instead he turned and tossed and kicked about and felt so hot that he longed to get in the river and cool himself. Then he fell half asleep and dreamt he heard the little girl in white crying to him: 'Oh, you're so dirty. Go and be washed.' And then he dreamt he heard the Irishwoman saying: 'Those that wish to be clean, clean they will be.'

And all of a sudden he found himself, not in the outhouse on the hay, but in the meadow beside the stream. He had got there on his own legs between sleeping and waking, as children often will get out of bed and wander about the room when they are not well.

He lay down on the grass beside the brook and looked into the clear, clear water, where every pebble at the bottom was bright and clean. Little silver trout dashed about in fright at the sight of his black face.

'I will be a fish,' he said to himself, 'and swim in the water and be clean.'



He lay down on the grass beside the brook

So he pulled off his ragged clothes and put his feet into the water; then his legs; and the further he went in the more the church bells rang in his head.

And all the while he never saw the Irishwoman who had stepped down into the cool clear water before him. Her shawl and her petticoat floated off her and the green water-weeds floated around her, and the white water-lilies floated round her head and the fairies of the stream came up from the bottom and bore her down and away in their arms. For she was the Queen of them all.

'Where have you been?' they asked her.

'I have been smoothing sick people's pillows,' she said, 'and whispering sweet dreams into their ears. I have been opening cottage windows to let out the stifling air and coaxing little children away from gutters and foul pools where fever breeds. I have been stopping the hands of men who were going to strike their wives, and doing all I could to help those who will not help themselves. And I have brought you a new little brother.'

Then all the fairies laughed for joy at the thought of Tom, their new little brother. But their Queen said:

'But mind, he must not see you. He is a savage and he must learn. So you must not play with him or speak to him or let him see you. Only keep him from being harmed.'

Tom, of course, heard none of this; neither did he see the fairies. Some people think there are no fairies. But there must be. Why? Because this is a fairy-tale and how can one have a fairy-tale if there are no fairies?

The kind old school-teacher came to look for Tom in the out-house when school was over, but there was no Tom there. So she went away again, thinking that Tom had tricked her with a false story, pretended to be ill and then run away.

But she changed her mind next day when Sir John came looking for Tom. Sir John had heard the whole story now from Miss Ellie, the beautiful little girl in white. Miss Ellie had screamed because she was frightened and not because Tom had stolen anything. It was all a mistake.

So Sir John told Grimes to go home and promised him five shillings if he would bring the boy back without beating him, so that he might be sure of the truth.

But Grimes, of course, could not find Tom and next day Sir John rode over the moors to Vendale, searching for him.

'Heaven forgive us,' Sir John cried, 'if the boy has fallen and been killed.' For he could not believe that Tom had come so far over such rough and dangerous ground.

He came to the door of the old woman's cottage.

'Welcome to Vendale, Sir John,' she said. 'But you're not hunting fox this time of year?'

'I am hunting,' he said, 'and strange game too. I'm looking for a lost child, a chimney-sweep, who has run away.'

'So he told me the truth after all, poor little dear,' she said. And she told Sir John all that had happened.

They went to the meadow and on a tree stump beside the stream they found Tom's clothes, but no Tom.

What had happened to Tom?

Tom had fallen asleep. When he woke he found himself

swimming about in the stream — and he was only four inches long!

In fact the fairies had turned him into a water-baby.

A water-baby? You never heard of a water-baby? Perhaps not. That is the very reason this story was written. There are a great many things in the world which you have never heard of.

'But there are no such things as water-babies.'

How do you know that? Have you been there to see? You must not talk about 'no such things' and 'can't' when you speak of this great wonderful world around us. The truth is that people think that things cannot be simply because they have not



'Welcome to Vendale, Sir John'

seen them, the way a savage might think there cannot be such a thing as a train because he never saw one running wild in the forest.

No water-babies? Are there not water-rats, water-flies, sea-lions, sea-horses and sea-urchins? Don't you know that dragon-flies live under water till they change their skins, just as Tom changed his? And if a water animal can change into a land animal why should not a land animal sometimes change into a water animal?

At all events it happened to Tom. Therefore Sir John made a great mistake and was unhappy without any reason when he found a black thing in the stream and thought it was Tom's body and that Tom had been drowned.

Sir John was mistaken. Tom was alive and cleaner and merrier than he had ever been. The fairies had washed him, you see, in the swift river, so thoroughly that not only his dirt but his whole husk and shell had been washed off him, and the pretty little real Tom was washed out of the inside of it, and swam away.

But good Sir John did not understand all this and he came as near to crying as he ever had in his life. And the dairymaid cried and the keeper cried and so did the little girl Ellie. Grimes didn't, for Sir John gave him ten pounds and he drank it all in a week. They put a little tombstone over Tom's shell in the churchyard at Vendale and the kind old school-teacher put flowers on it every Sunday. And she sang an old song which the children couldn't understand though they liked it none the less. These are the words of it:

When all the world is young, lad,
    And all the trees are green;
And every goose a swan, lad,
    And every lass a queen;
Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
    And round the world away:
Young blood must have its course, lad,
    And every dog his day.
When all the world is old, lad,
    And all the trees are brown;
And all the sport is stale, lad,
    And all the wheels run down;
Creep home, and take your place there,
    The spent and maimed among:
God grant you find one face there,
    You loved when all was young.

* * * * *

And all the time Tom was swimming about in the river with a pretty little lace collar of gills around his neck, as lively as a grig and as clean as a fresh-run salmon. For the first time in his life he felt how comfortable it was to have nothing on but himself. But though he enjoyed it, he did not know what had happened. He couldn't remember any of his old troubles, being tired or hungry or beaten or sent up dark chimneys.

That wasn't strange, for you know when you came into this world and became a land-baby you remembered nothing. So

why should Tom remember anything when he became a water-baby?

He was very happy in the water. He had been sadly overworked in the land-world. So now to make up for it he had nothing but holidays in the water-world. He had nothing to do but enjoy himself, and look at all the pretty things which are to be seen in the cool, clear water-world where the sun is never too hot and the frost is never too cold.

What did he live on? Watercresses, perhaps, or perhaps water-gruel and water-biscuits. Sometimes he went along the smooth gravel waterways looking at the crickets which ran in and out among the stones as rabbits do on land. Sometimes he came to a deep still pool and there he saw the water-forests. They would have looked to you like little weeds; but Tom, you must remember, was so small that everything looked a hundred times as big to him as it does to you, just as things do to a minnow.

And in the water-forest he saw the water-monkeys and the water-squirrels. There were water-flowers there, too, in thousands. Tom tried to pick them, but as soon as he touched them they drew themselves in and turned into knots of jelly. Then Tom saw they were all alive — bells and stars and wheels and flowers of beautiful shapes and colours — all alive and busy, just as Tom was. So he found that there was a great deal more in the world than he had fancied at first sight.

Now you must know that all the things under the water talk, only not in the same language as ours. They talk the way horses and dogs and cows and birds talk to each other. Tom soon learned to understand them and talk to them, so that he might

have had very pleasant company if he had only been a good boy.

But I am sorry to say he was too like some other little boys, very fond of hunting and teasing creatures for fun. Some people say that boys cannot help it, that it is their nature. But whether it's their nature or not, little boys can help it and must help it. For if they have naughty, low, mischievous tricks in their nature as monkeys have, that is no reason why they should give way to those tricks like monkeys who know no better. Therefore they must not torment dumb animals, for if they do a certain old lady who is coming will surely give them what they deserve.

Tom did not know that and he teased the poor water things



And there he saw the water-forests

till they were all afraid of him, and ran away from him or crept into their shells. So he had no one to speak to, or to play with.

The water-fairies, of course, were very sorry to see him so unhappy. They longed to take him and teach him to be good, to romp and play with him. But they had been forbidden to do that. Tom had to learn his lesson for himself by experience, as many other foolish persons have to do, though there may be kind hearts yearning over them all the while, longing to teach them what they can only teach themselves.

Tom came to a pool full of little trout and began tormenting them and trying to catch them. But they slipped through his fingers and jumped clean out of the water in their fright. As Tom chased them he came close to a great dark cave under an alder root and out darted a huge old brown trout ten times as big as Tom. It ran into him and knocked all the breath out of his body.

Tom went on, sulky and alone as he deserved to be. Under a bank he saw a very ugly creature sitting. The creature was about half as big as Tom and it had six legs and a big stomach and the most ridiculous head with two great eyes and a face just like a donkey's.

'Oh,' Tom said, 'you are an ugly fellow!' And he began making faces at him. He put his nose close to him and shouted, like a very rude boy.

When, hey presto! All the thing's donkey face came off in a moment, out popped a long arm with a pair of pincers at the end of it and caught Tom by the nose. It did not hurt him much; but it held him tight.

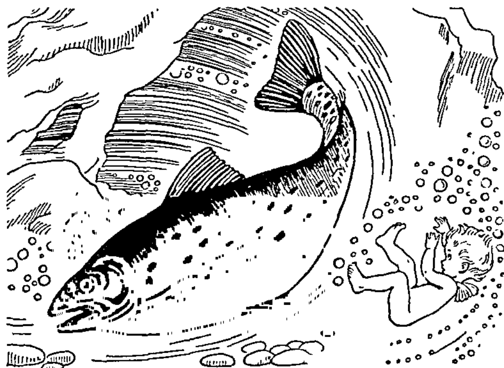
'Yah, ah! Let me go!' Tom cried.

'Then let me go,' the creature said. 'I want to be quiet. I want to split.'

'Why do you want to split?' Tom asked.

'Because my brothers and sisters have all split and turned into beautiful creatures with wings. I want to split too. Don't speak to me. I shall split. I will split.'

Tom stood still and watched him. He swelled himself and puffed and stretched himself out stiff and at last — crack, puff, bang! — he opened all down his back and then up to the top of his head.



And out darted a huge old brown trout

And out of his inside came the most slender, elegant, soft creature, as soft and smooth as Tom; but very pale and weak, like a little child who has been ill a long time. It moved its legs very feebly and looked around, half ashamed. And then it began walking slowly up a grass stem to the top of the water.

Tom was so astonished that he never said a word; he stared with all his eyes. He went up to the surface of the water too and peeped out to see what would happen.

As the creature sat in the warm bright sun a wonderful change came over it. It grew strong and firm. The most lovely colours began to show on its body, blue and yellow and black, spots and bars and rings. Out of its back rose four great wings of bright brown gauze. Its eyes grew so large that they filled all its head and shone like ten thousand diamonds.

'Oh, you beautiful thing!' Tom said, and he put out his hand to catch it.

But it flew up into the air and hung poised on its wings for a moment. Then it settled down again by Tom, quite fearless.

'No, you cannot catch me,' it said. 'I am a dragonfly now, the king of all the flies, and I shall dance in the sunshine and catch gnats and have a beautiful wife like myself.' And he flew away into the air.

'Come back,' Tom cried. 'Come back, beautiful thing. I have no one to play with and I am so lonely here. If you will come back I will never try to catch you.'

'I don't care whether you do or not,' said the dragonfly, 'for you can't.'



'Oh, you beautiful thing!' Tom said

But he did come back later and chatted with Tom. He talked about the wonderful things he had seen in the trees and the meadows. Tom liked to listen to him for Tom had forgotten about them. So in a little while they became great friends.

Tom learned such a lesson that day that he didn't tease animals for a long time afterwards.

He and the trout also made it up. They played together at hare and hounds. Tom tried to leap out of the water, head over heels, as trout do before a shower comes, but somehow he could never manage it. Often Tom caught flies, as they touched the surface of the water, and gave them to the trout. Perhaps this

And out of his inside came the most slender, elegant, soft creature, as soft and smooth as Tom; but very pale and weak, like a little child who has been ill a long time. It moved its legs very feebly and looked around, half ashamed. And then it began walking slowly up a grass stem to the top of the water.

Tom was so astonished that he never said a word; he stared with all his eyes. He went up to the surface of the water too and peeped out to see what would happen.

As the creature sat in the warm bright sun a wonderful change came over it. It grew strong and firm. The most lovely colours began to show on its body, blue and yellow and black, spots and bars and rings. Out of its back rose four great wings of bright brown gauze. Its eyes grew so large that they filled all its head and shone like ten thousand diamonds.

'Oh, you beautiful thing!' Tom said, and he put out his hand to catch it.

But it flew up into the air and hung poised on its wings for a moment. Then it settled down again by Tom, quite fearless.

'No, you cannot catch me,' it said. 'I am a dragonfly now, the king of all the flies, and I shall dance in the sunshine and catch gnats and have a beautiful wife like myself.' And he flew away into the air.

'Come back,' Tom cried. 'Come back, beautiful thing. I have no one to play with and I am so lonely here. If you will come back I will never try to catch you.'

'I don't care whether you do or not,' said the dragonfly, 'for you can't.'



'Oh, you beautiful thing!' Tom said

But he did come back later and chatted with Tom. He talked about the wonderful things he had seen in the trees and the meadows. Tom liked to listen to him for Tom had forgotten about them. So in a little while they became great friends.

Tom learned such a lesson that day that he didn't tease animals for a long time afterwards.

He and the trout also made it up. They played together at hare and hounds. Tom tried to leap out of the water, head over heels, as trout do before a shower comes, but somehow he could never manage it. Often Tom caught flies, as they touched the surface of the water, and gave them to the trout. Perhaps this

was not kind to the flies, but one must do a good turn to one's friends when one can.

At last he gave up catching even the flies, for he made friends with one by accident and found him a very merry little fellow.

One day Tom had a new adventure: he met a furry creature playing with its children. It was a mother otter and one of the prettiest things Tom had ever seen. But when the mother otter saw Tom she cried out in water language to her little ones:

'Quick, children, here is something to eat!' and she darted at poor Tom, who had thought her very handsome. Handsome, he said to himself, is as handsome does, and he slipped in between some water-lily roots as fast as he could.

'Come away, children,' said the otter in disgust. 'It is not worth eating after all. It is only a nasty newt.'

'I am not a newt,' Tom said. 'Newts have tails.'

'I say you are a newt and therefore you are,' said the otter. 'You may stay there, for all I care, until the salmon eat you.'

'What are salmon?' Tom asked, a little frightened.

'Fish that come out of the sea where we hunt them. It is such fun. If it were not for those horrid men,' she sighed.

'What are men?' Tom asked, but somehow he seemed to know already.

'Two legged things, newt,' she said. 'And now I come to look at you, they are something like you, if you hadn't a tail.' (She was determined that Tom should have a tail, though of course he hadn't.) 'Only they're a great deal bigger, worse luck for us. They speared my poor dear husband.'

As she spoke seven little terrier dogs came sniffing up to

the water's edge, in full cry after the otter. But she sailed safely away down the stream, followed by her children.

When she had gone all Tom could think of was what the otter had said about the sea where the salmon came from. And he longed to go and see it.

One evening it suddenly grew dark. The thunder roared and the lightning flashed till the very rocks in the stream seemed to shake. Tom, looking up at the storm through the water, thought it was the finest thing he had ever seen in his life.

The rain came down in bucketsful and the hail hammered like shot on the stream and churned it into foam. Then Tom



'It is not worth eating after all. It is only a nasty newt'

saw a new sight: all the bottom of the stream was alive with great eels, turning and twisting, hurrying past him so fiercely and wildly that he was quite frightened.

'We must run, we must run,' they said. 'What a jolly thunderstorm! Down to the sea, down to the sea.'

And the otter came by too, sweeping along as fast as the eels. She saw Tom as she swam and said:

'Now is your time, newt, if you want to see the world. Down to the sea.'

'Oh stay and wait for me,' Tom cried, but they were gone.

Tom was deafened and blinded for a moment by the water rushing past, sweeping him with it downwards towards the great world below, towards the salmon and the breakers and the wide, wide sea. He could not stop. He did not want to stop. When daylight came Tom found himself out in the salmon river.

It was so wide that he thought: 'This must be the sea,' and he crept into a crack in the rock and waited for someone to tell him the way. He was so tired he slept, and when he woke up he saw a sight which made him jump.

A fish, but what a fish! It was shining silver from head to tail and ten times as big as the biggest trout. It sculled up the stream past him as easily as Tom had sculled down.

It was a stately salmon and beside it swam the salmon's wife.

'My dear,' said the great fish to his wife, 'you look dreadfully tired and should rest a while behind this rock.' And he shoved her gently by the nose towards the rock where Tom was hiding.

'Oh, don't hurt me!' Tom cried when the salmon saw him. 'I was only looking at you because you are so handsome.'

'Ah?' said the salmon very politely. 'I really beg your pardon. I have met one or two creatures like you before and found them very agreeable and well-behaved.'

'So you have seen things like me before?' Tom said.

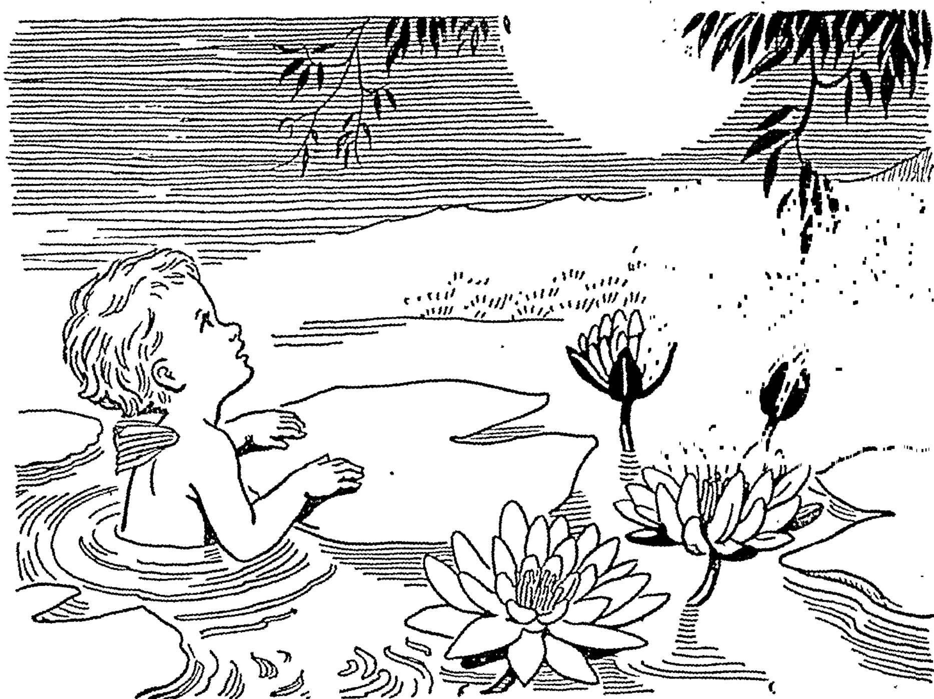
'Often, my dear.'

'So there are babies in the sea!' Tom cried and clapped his little hands. 'I shall have someone to play with there.'

* * * * *



'So there are babies in the sea!'



He came up to the surface and looked up at the broad yellow moon

So the salmon went up the river and Tom went down the river until he reached the seashore. He was many days doing it, for it was many miles down to the sea. Perhaps he never would have found his way if the fairies had not guided him without his seeing their fair faces or feeling their gentle hands.

On the way he had a strange adventure. It was a clear, still September night and the moon shone so brightly down through the water that he could not sleep, though he shut his eyes as tight as possible. He came up to the surface and looked up at the broad yellow moon and wondered what she was and thought that she looked at him.

Suddenly he saw a beautiful sight. A bright red light moved along the riverside and threw down into the water a long tap-root of flame. Tom went to see what it was. There beneath the flame lay five or six great salmon, looking up at the flame with their goggle eyes and wagging their tails as if they were pleased with it. Tom swam up to the surface to look at the wonderful light more closely.

He made a splash and he heard a voice say:

'Wasn't that a fish that rose?'

He didn't know what the words meant, but he seemed to know the sound of them. Then he saw on the bank two great two-legged creatures. One held the light and the other a long pole. And Tom knew they were men. He was frightened and he crept into a hole in the rock from where he could see what went on.

The man with the torch bent down to the water and said:

'Spear that big fellow there. He's over fifteen pounds. Hold your hand steady.'

Tom felt there was danger coming and he wanted to warn the foolish salmon who kept staring up at the light as though he were bewitched. But before Tom could make up his mind, down came the pole through the water. There was a fearful splash and struggle. The poor salmon was speared right through and lifted out of the water.

Then, from behind, there sprang on these two men two other men. There were shouts and blows and words which Tom remembered having heard somewhere before — strange, ugly, angry words. And it all came back to him. They were men and

they were fighting. It was savage, desperate fighting such as Tom had seen too many times before.

He stopped up his ears and was very glad he was a water-baby and had nothing to do any more with men with their dirty clothes on their backs and foul words on their lips.

All of a sudden there was a big splash, a frightful flash of light and a hissing. Then all was still.

The man who held the lighted torch in his hand had fallen into the river close to Tom. He sank into the swift flowing river and rolled over and over in the current. He drifted into a deep hole and lay there very still.

'Perhaps,' Tom thought, 'the water has made him fall asleep, as it did me.'

The moon shone so brightly that Tom could see the man's face. And he remembered it bit by bit. It was his old master, Grimes.

Tom turned tail and swam away as fast as he could.

'Oh, dear me,' he thought. 'Now Mr. Grimes will turn into a water-baby. Perhaps he will find me and beat me again!'

But Mr. Grimes did not turn into a water-baby—or anything like one. Tom didn't know it, but the fairies carried Mr. Grimes away—and put him exactly where he ought to be put. Mr. Grimes never poached salmon again.

Tom, afraid to stay near Grimes, swam on. He went down the river past great bridges, past boats and barges, past the big town with its wharves and mills, past ships at anchor. He peeped above the water sometimes and saw sailors on board the ships smoking their pipes. He ducked under again, afraid of



He went down the river, past boats and barges

being caught by a man and turned into a chimney-sweep again.

It was a weary journey, as all journeys are for people who make up their minds, as Tom did, to go and see the world. But Tom didn't give up.

One morning, to his surprise, the stream turned round and ran inland. It was the tide, of course, but Tom knew nothing about the tide. The water around him turned salty and a change came over him. He felt strong and light and fresh, and he swam forward with a good heart.

He passed great shoals of bass and mullet and, once, a big black shining seal. The seal put his head and shoulders out of

the water and stared at Tom. Tom, instead of being frightened, said:

'How do you do, sir. What a fine place the sea is.'

The old seal instead of trying to bite him said: 'Good morning, my little man. Are you looking for your brothers and sisters? I passed them at play a while ago.'

'Oh,' Tom said, 'I shall have playfellows at last!' and he swam on cheerfully.

But he found no water-babies. He sat down on the bottom of the sea and cried salt tears from sheer disappointment. After coming all this way it did seem hard. But people, even little babies, cannot have everything they want without waiting for it.

Tom waited long days, long weeks, wondering when the water-babies would come. He asked the bass and the pollock, but they were so greedy for the shrimps that they did not answer. He asked the sea-snails and they said:

'Whence we come we know not, and whither we are going who can tell? Yes, perhaps we have seen the water-babies. We have seen many strange things as we sailed along.'

Then there came by a shoal of porpoises, rolling as they went, and when Tom asked them all they answered was: 'Hush, hush, hush,' for that was all they had learned to say.

One day among the rocks Tom did find a playfellow. It was not a water-baby, alas, but a lobster. Tom thought him the most curious, odd, ridiculous creature he had ever seen. The lobster said he had often seen water-babies. But he did not think much of them. They were meddlesome little things who went about helping fish that had got into scrapes. For his part

he would be ashamed to be helped by soft little creatures who hadn't even a shell on their backs.

He was a conceited fellow, the old lobster. But he was so funny and Tom was so lonely that he could not quarrel with him. They used to sit in holes in the rocks and chat for hours.

Now it happened that one day when Tom was sitting with his friend the lobster who should walk along the seashore but Ellie, the beautiful little girl in white whom he had frightened that day so long ago in Harthover House! She was walking with an old man, a professor, who told her wisely about the things which live in the sea.



He asked the sea-snails

But Ellie was not satisfied. She liked better to play with children or even with dolls. 'If there were children now in the water, as there used to be, I could see them and play with them,' she said.

The old man laughed at her. And as he groped under the weeds with his fishing net he caught—poor little Tom. He lifted the net out quickly with Tom all tangled up in the meshes.

'Dear me!' he exclaimed. 'It actually has eyes. Why, he must be a Cephalopod! Most extraordinary!'

'No, I'm not!' Tom shouted, for he did not like to be called names, not even long scientific names.

'It is a water-baby,' Ellie said. And of course it was.

'Water nonsense, my dear,' said the professor, and turned sharply away. But there was no denying it. It was a water-baby. And he had said a moment ago that there was no such thing. What was he to do?

He poked Tom, trying to think of something to say. Tom was so frightened and angry that he suddenly bit the professor's finger.

'Oh! Yah!' the professor cried and, glad of an excuse to be rid of Tom, dropped him back into the sea.

'But it was a water-baby,' Ellie said. 'I am sure I heard him speak.'

She jumped down off the rock and tried to catch Tom before he swam away. Too late! What was worse, she slipped and fell. She hit her head on a sharp rock and lay quite still.

The professor picked her up and tried to waken her. He called to her and cried over her, for he loved her very much,

but she would not waken. He took her up in his arms and carried her to her governess and they all went home. Ellie was put to bed and lay there very still. Only now and then she woke up and called out about the water-baby, but no one knew what she meant and the professor did not tell, because he was ashamed to.

And after a week, one moonlight night, the fairies came flying in at the window. They brought Ellie such a pretty pair of wings that she could not help trying them on. With them she flew out of the window and over the land and over the sea and up through the clouds.

And nobody heard or saw anything of Ellie for a very long time.

* * * * *

But what became of Tom?

He slipped away off the rocks into the water when the professor dropped him. But Tom could not help thinking about Ellie. He did not remember who she was, but he knew she was a little girl, even though she was a hundred times as big as he. This is not surprising. Size has nothing to do with kindred. A tiny weed may be first cousin to a great tree. A little dog, a Pekinese, knows that an Alsatian is a dog too, no matter how much bigger it is. So Tom knew that Ellie was a little girl and he thought about her all that day. He longed to have her to play with, but very soon he had something else to think of.

And here is the account of what happened to Tom, as it was



She flew out of the window — over the land and over the sea

published next morning in the Waterproof Gazette, on the finest watered paper, for the use of the great fairy Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did, who reads the news very carefully every morning, especially the police cases, as you will soon hear.

Tom was going along the rocks in three-fathom water, watching the pollock catch prawns,when he saw a round cage made of green willow twigs. Inside it, looking very much ashamed of himself, sat Tom's friend the lobster, twiddling his pincers instead of his thumbs.

Have you been naughty?' Tom asked. 'And have they put you in the lock-up?'

The lobster was indignant at such a notion, but he was too downhearted and depressed to argue. So all he said was: 'I can't get out.'

'Why did you get in?'

'I came in after that nasty piece of dead fish.' The lobster had thought it looked and smelt very nice when he was outside, but now he turned round and abused it because he was angry with himself.

'Where did you get in?'

'Through that round hole at the top.'

'Then why don't you get out through it?'

'Because I can't.' The lobster twiddled his pincers more fiercely than ever, but he was forced to confess: 'I have jumped upwards, downwards, backwards and sideways at least four thousand times, and I can't get out.'

Tom looked at the trap and having more sense than the lobster, he saw plainly enough what was the matter—as you would too if you had looked at a lobster-pot.

'Stop a bit,' said Tom. 'Turn your tail up to me and I'll pull you through hind foremost and then you won't stick in the spikes.'

But the lobster was so stupid and clumsy that he couldn't find the hole. Tom reached in and felt down after him till he caught hold of him. Then, as you might expect, the clumsy lobster pulled Tom inside head foremost.

'Well,' said Tom, 'here's a fine business. Take your claws and break the points off those spikes. Then we'll both get out quite easily.'



They saw a great dark cloud over them — it was the otter

'I never thought of that,' said the lobster, 'and after all the experience of life I've had!'

You see, experience is of very little good unless a man, or a lobster, has sense enough to make use of it.

They had not got half the spikes away when they saw a great dark cloud over them. Lo and behold—it was the otter!

How she grinned when she saw Tom. 'Yar,' she growled, 'you little meddlesome wretch, I have you now!' And she crawled all over the pot, trying to get in.

Tom was horribly frightened, and still more frightened when at last she found the hole in the top and squeezed herself right

down through it, all eyes and teeth. But no sooner was her head inside than brave Mr. Lobster caught her by the nose and held on.

There they were, all three in the pot, rolling over and over, and very tight packed they were. The lobster tore at the otter and the otter tore at the lobster. Both squeezed and thumped Tom till he had no breath left in his body, and I don't know what would have happened to him if he had not at last got on to the otter's back and crawled safely out of the hole.

He was glad to be out again, but he would not desert his friend who had saved him from the otter. The first time he saw the lobster's tail uppermost, he caught hold of it and pulled with all his might.

But the lobster would not let go of the otter.

'Come on,' Tom said. 'Don't you see she is dead?' And so she was, quite drowned and dead.

That was the end of the wicked otter.

But the lobster still would not let go.

'Come along, you stupid old stick-in-the-mud,' Tom cried, 'or the fisherman will catch you!' And that was true, for Tom felt someone above beginning to haul up the pot.

But the lobster would not let go.

Tom saw the fisherman haul him up to the boatside and thought it was all up with the poor lobster. But when the lobster saw the fisherman he gave such a furious and tremendous *snap* that he snapped out of his hand and out of the pot and safely into the sea.

But he left his claw behind him, for it never came into his

stupid head to let go. He just shook his claw off as the easier way.

Tom asked the lobster why he hadn't let go. And the lobster said that never letting go was a point of honour among lobsters.

Now a most wonderful thing happened to Tom. He had not left the lobster five minutes before he came at last upon a water-baby!

A real live water-baby, sitting on the white sand. When it saw Tom it looked up and cried:

'Why, you are one of us! You are a new baby. How wonderful!'

It ran towards Tom and Tom ran towards it, and they hugged and kissed each other. They did not need any introductions there under the water.

'Where have you been all this time?' Tom asked. 'I have been looking for you so long.'

'We have been here for days. There are hundreds of us. How was it you didn't see us?'

Tom looked at the baby more carefully and said: 'How odd! I have seen things just like you again and again, but I thought you were shells or sea creatures. I never took you for a water-baby like myself.'

Now wasn't that strange? No doubt you will wish to know why Tom never before realised he had been among the water-babies all the time. If you will read this story nine times over and think for yourself you will find out why. It is because it is not good for little boys to be told everything and never be forced to use their own good sense. They have to learn for themselves.

'Now,' said the baby, 'come and help me, for it's time to go home.'

'What shall I help you do?'

'Help me with this poor rock. A great boulder came rolling by in the last storm and knocked its head off and rubbed off all its flowers. We must plant it again with seaweeds and sea-anemones and make it into a pretty rock garden.'

So they worked away at the rock and planted it and smoothed the sand down round it. Then Tom heard the other babies coming, laughing and singing, shouting and romping. And he knew that he had been hearing and seeing the water-babies all



A real live water-baby, sitting on the white sand

the time. Only he did not know them, because his eyes and ears were not opened.

They came, dozens and dozens of them. Some were bigger than Tom and some were smaller. All wore the neatest little white bathing-suits and when they found out that he was a new baby they hugged and kissed him and danced around him on the sand, and there was never anyone happier than poor Tom.

'Now then,' they all said at once, 'we must go home or the tide will leave us high and dry. We have mended all the broken seaweed and put all the rock pools in order and planted all the shells again in the sand and nobody will see where the ugly storm swept by last week.'

This is the reason why the rock pools are always so neat and clean: because the water-babies come inshore after every storm to sweep them out and comb them down and put them to rights again.

And where is the home of the water-babies? It is in St. Brandan's fairy isle.

Did you never hear of the blessed St. Brandan and how he preached to the wild Irish? But the wild Irish would not listen to him and St. Brandan sailed away to the westward, to the fairy islands, and was never heard of again. When he came to the fairy island it was full of cedar trees and beautiful birds. He sat under the cedars and preached to all the birds of the air. And they liked his sermons so well that they told the fishes in the sea, and they came. And the fishes told the water-babies and they came by hundreds, and St. Brandan got quite a nice little Sunday school.

There he taught the water-babies for a great many hundred years, till his eyes grew too dim to see and his beard grew so long that the dared not walk for fear of treading on it. And at last he fell fast asleep under the cedar-trees and there he sleeps until this day. But the fairies took the water-babies and taught them their lessons.

Some say that St. Brandan one day will awake and begin to teach the babies once more. And on clear summer evenings, when the sun sinks down into the sea among golden cloud-caps and cloud islands, the sailors fancy that they see, away to the westward, St. Brandan's fairy isle.

When Tom got there he found that the isle stood on pillars of marble and its foundations were full of caves and grottoes. All were curtained and draped with seaweeds, purple and crimson, green and brown, and strewn with white sand on which the water-babies slept at night. To keep the place clean the crabs picked up all the scraps from the floor and ate them.

There were water-babies in thousands, more than Tom, or you either, could count. All the little children whom the good fairies love, because their cruel mothers and fathers don't, all those that come to grief through unkindness or ignorance or neglect, all the little children who die of fever and measles and scarlatina — they were all there.

Tom, I'm sorry to say, had not given up all his naughty tricks, and he still teased the dumb animals who were there, frightening the crabs and putting stones into the anemones' mouths to make them think that their dinner was coming.

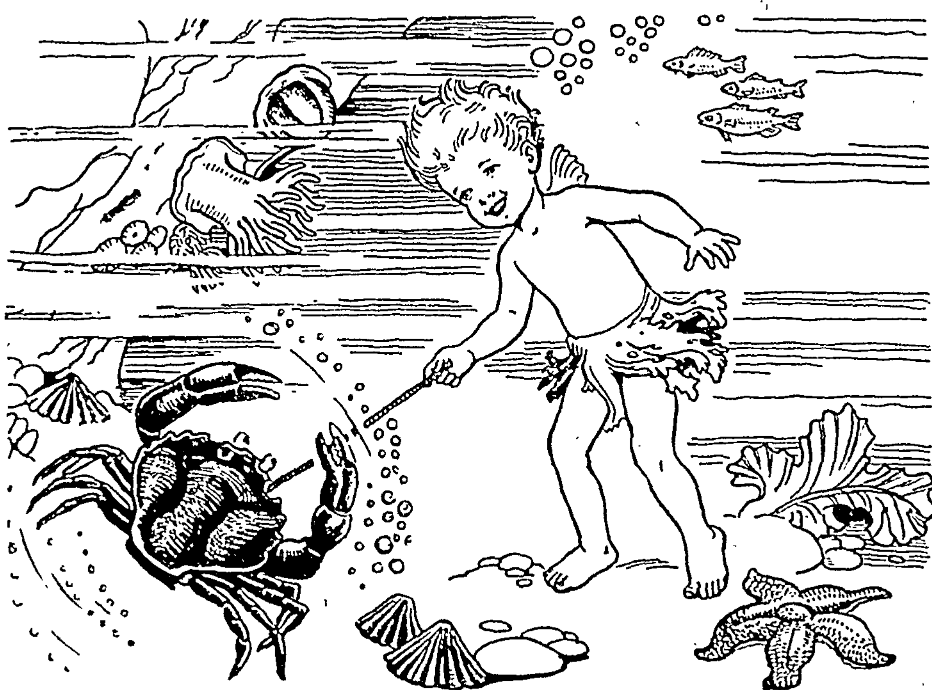
The other children warned him and said: 'Take care

what you do because Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did is coming.'

Tom paid no attention, until early one Friday morning Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did really did come.

She was a tremendous lady and when the children saw her they all stood in a row, very upright, and smoothed down their bathing-suits and put their hands behind their backs.

She had on a black bonnet and a black shawl. She wore a pair of large green spectacles over a great hooked nose. Under her arm she carried a long birch-rod. She was so ugly, Tom thought, that he was tempted to make faces at her. But he didn't, because of the birch-rod.



Tom had not given up all his naughty tricks

She looked at the children one by one and then began giving them all sorts of nice sea-things — sea-cakes, sea-apples, sea-bull's-eyes, sea-toffee. Best of all she gave them sea-ices made out of sea-cows' cream which never melts under water.

Tom watched until his mouth watered and his eyes grew as round as an owl's. But when it was his turn the lady held out something to him and popped it into his mouth. Guess what it was — it was a nasty hard pebble!

'You are a very cruel woman,' Tom said, beginning to cry.

'And you are a very cruel boy,' she said. 'You put pebbles into the mouths of the sea-anemones to take them in and make them think they have caught a good dinner. As you did to them, so I must to do you.'

'Who told you that?' Tom asked.

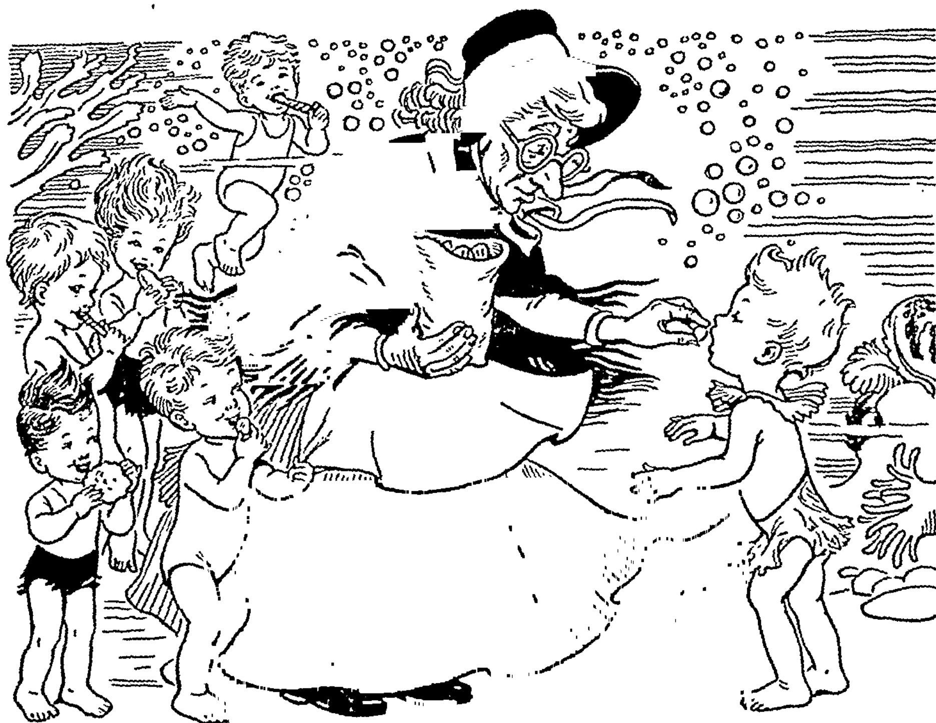
'You did yourself, this very minute.'

Tom was much taken aback, for he had never opened bis lips.

'Yes,' she went on, 'everyone tells me exactly what he has done wrong without knowing it. So it's no use trying to hide anything from me. Now go and be a good boy. I will put no more pebbles in your mouth if you put none in other creatures' mouths.'

'I didn't know there was any harm in it,' Tom said.

'Well, you know now. People always say that to me, but I tell them, if you don't know that fire burns that's no reason why it shouldn't burn you. The lobster did not know there was any harm getting into the lobster pot, but it caught him all the same.'



The lady held out something to him and popped it into his mouth

'Dear me,' thought Tom, 'she knows everything.'

And so she did.

'I cannot help punishing people when they do wrong,' she said in a kinder voice. 'I like it no more than they do. Often I'm sorry for them, but I cannot help it. For I work by machinery, like a watch. I am wound up very carefully so that I cannot help going.'

'Was it a long time since they wound you up?' Tom asked; for he thought, she will run down some day and then I shall be safe.

'So long ago that I forget all about it,' she told him.

'Dear me,' Tom said, 'you must have been made a long time.'

'I was never made, my child,' she said with a sad but very sweet look on her face, 'and I shall go on for ever and ever. Because I am as old as Eternity and yet as young as Time.'

Tom smiled into her face because she looked so pleasant suddenly. She smiled too and said:

'You thought me very ugly just now, didn't you? I am very ugly—the ugliest fairy in the world, and shall be until people behave themselves as they should. Then I shall grow as handsome as my sister who is the loveliest fairy in the world. Her name is Do-as-you-would-be-done-by. She comes here every Sunday and perhaps she will take notice of you and teach you how to behave.'

And so Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did went.

Tom determined to be a very good boy all Saturday, and he was. He never frightened a crab, nor tickled any live corals, nor put stones into the sea-anemones' mouths. When Sunday morning came, sure enough Mrs. Do-as-you-would-be-done-by came too. All the little children began dancing and clapping their hands and Tom danced too with all his might.

As for the pretty lady I cannot tell you what colour her hair was or her eyes were. When anyone looks at her all they can think is that she has the sweetest, kindest, tenderest, funniest, merriest face they ever saw or want to see.

Tom saw that she was a very tall woman, as tall as her sister. But instead of being gnarly and horny and scaly and prickly, she was the most nice, soft, fat, smooth, cuddly creature who ever

nursed a baby. And when the children saw her they all caught hold of her and pulled her until she sat down on a stone. They climbed into her lap and clung round her neck and caught hold of her hands. Then they began to cuddle up and purr like so many kittens. Those that could get nowhere else sat down on the sand and cuddled her feet. Tom stood staring at them, for he could not understand what it was all about.

'And who are you, you little darling?' she asked him.

'That is the new baby,' all the others cried, 'and he never had any mother.'

'Then I will be his mother,' she smiled, and she took Tom in her arms and kissed him and patted him and talked to him tenderly and low, such things as he had never heard before in his life. Tom looked up into her eyes and loved her until he fell fast asleep from pure love.

When he awoke she was telling the children a story. She told them the story which begins every Christmas Eve and yet goes on for ever and ever. As she went on the children listened seriously, but not sadly for she never told anything sad. Tom listened too, and never grew tired of listening. He listened so long that he fell asleep again, and when he woke up the lady was still nursing him.

'Don't go away,' Tom said. 'This is so nice. I never had anyone to cuddle me before.'

*   *   *   *   *



'Then I will be his mother,' and she took Tom in her arms

Here I come to the saddest part of all my story. I know some people who will only laugh at it and call it much ado about nothing. But I know one man who would not. He is an officer with a fine large grey moustache who once said in company that two of the most heart-breaking sights in the world which moved him most to tears, which he would do anything to prevent or remedy, were a child with a broken toy or a child stealing sweets.

The company did not laugh at him. He was too important an officer for that, but after he had gone they called him sentimental and so forth. All except one old Quaker lady who was

not, of course, generally fond of soldiers. She said, very quietly:

'Friends, that was a truly brave man.'

Now you may think that Tom was quite good when he had everything he could want or wish for, but you would be mistaken. Being quite comfortable is a very good thing, but it does not make people good. Sometimes it even makes them naughty, as it made the people in the Bible who waxed fat and kicked, like horses overfed and underworked.

And this happened to Tom. He grew so fond of sea-bull's-eyes and sea-lollipops that his foolish little head could think of nothing else. He was always longing for more and wondering when the strange lady would come again and give him some, and what she would give him and how much, and whether she would give him more than the others. He thought of nothing but lollipops by day and dreamt of nothing else by night.

And what happened then?

Tom began to watch the lady to see where she kept the sweet things. He began to hide and follow her about, pretending to be looking the other way or going after something else, till at last he found out that she kept them in a beautiful mother-of-pearl box, away in a deep crack of the rocks.

He longed to go to the box, but he was afraid. Then he longed again and was less afraid. At last, by thinking of nothing else, he longed so much that he was not afraid at all.

One night when all the other children were asleep he went off among the rocks and got to the box. But when he saw all the good things inside he was frightened and wished he had never come there. He would only touch them once, and he did.

Then he would only taste one, and he did. Then he would only eat one, and he did. Then he would only eat two, and then three and so on . . .

He was terrified the fairy would come and catch him, so he began to gobble them down so fast he did not even taste them or have any pleasure in them. Then he began to feel sick and would only have one more; then only one more again — until he had eaten them all up!

And all the time, close behind him, stood Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did.

Some people may say: why didn't she keep her cupboard locked? Well, I don't know. But she never does keep her cupboard locked. Perhaps it's because she wishes people to learn to keep their fingers out of the fire by having them burned.

Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did took off her spectacles because she didn't like to see too much, and her eyes filled with tears. But all she said was:

'Ah, you poor little fellow, you are just like the rest.'

Tom didn't hear her, for she said it to herself. Nor did she fly at Tom to punish him, to hit him, poke him, pull him, pinch him, shake him and slap him. She didn't even question him, threaten him or make him confess.

No, she always leaves that kind of thing to anxious parents and teachers who, instead of giving children a fair trial, such as they would expect for themselves, force them by fright to confess their faults—which is cruel and unfair and not permitted by good British law.

She just said nothing at all about the matter, not even next

day when Tom came with the other children for sweets. He was terribly afraid of coming, but he was still more afraid of staying away in case anyone should suspect him. He was also dreadfully afraid there would be no sweets as he had eaten them all. But she pulled out just as many as usual which astonished Tom and frightened him still more.

When the fairy looked him straight in the face he shook from head to foot. She gave him, however, his share like the rest and he thought she couldn't have found him out.

But when he put the sweets into his mouth he hated the taste of them. They made him terribly sick. Next week he had his



And all the time, close behind him, stood Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did

share again and again the fairy looked him straight in the face, but more sadly than she had ever looked. And he couldn't bear the sweets, but he took them again in spite of himself.

That Sunday when Mrs. Do-as-you-would-be-done-by came. Tom wanted to be cuddled like the others, but she said to him very seriously:

'I should like to cuddle you but I cannot, because you are so horny and prickly.'

Tom looked at himself and saw that he had prickles all over, just like a sea-urchin. He went away and hid in a corner, for nobody would play with him and he knew full well why.

He was so miserable all that week that when the ugly fairy came again he could stand it no longer and pushed away the sweets she offered him, saying:

'No, I don't want any.' And he burst out crying and told her everything as it happened.

He expected her to punish him severely, but instead she took him up in her rough arms and said:

'I will forgive you, little man. I always forgive everyone the moment they tell me the truth of their own accord.'

'Then will you take away these nasty prickles?'

'That is a different matter,' she said. 'You put them there yourself and only you can take them away again.'

'How can I do that?'

'I think it is time for you to go to school. I'll fetch you a schoolmistress and she will teach you how to get rid of your prickles.'

And she brought to him the most beautiful little girl that ever

was seen, with long curls floating behind her like a golden cloud. The little girl seemed hardly to know how to begin, Tom was so backward. She taught him first what you have been taught ever since you said your first prayers at your mother's knees. And after a few weeks Tom's prickles went away and his skin was smooth and clean again.

'Dear me,' the little girl said, 'why, I know you now. You are the same little chimney-sweep who came into my bedroom at Harthover.'

'And I know you too,' Tom said. 'You are the little lady in white whom I saw in bed.'



He went away and hid in a corner, for nobody would play with him

It was, indeed, Ellie herself. And they told each other their stories, how he had got into the water, how she had fallen over the rock, how he had swum down to the sea, how she had flown out of the window.

Finally they set to work at their lessons again. Both liked the lessons so much that they went on till seven full years had passed.

Tom ought to haye been very happy during those seven years but one thing worried him. Ellie always went away on Sundays and she couldn't tell him where.

All she could say was that it was the most wonderful place in the world. Tom asked Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did why he couldn't go there too.

'Those who go there,' she told him, 'must first go where they do not like and do what they do not like and help somebody they do not like.'

Tom was very unhappy at that.

'I know what she wants me to do,' he said to Ellie. 'She wants me to go after that horrid Grimes. And he'll turn me into a chimney-sweep again.'

'Nobody can turn water-babies into sweeps,' Ellie said, 'so long as they are good.'

'I see what you want,' Tom said sulkily. 'You want me to go, because you are tired of me.'

Little Ellie opened her eyes very wide at that. 'Oh, Tom,' she said, beginning to cry because he was angry with her, 'Tom! Tom, where are you?'

And Tom too cried out: 'Ellie! Where are you?'



'And I know you too,' Tom said

For suddenly neither could see the other. Ellie had quite vanished. Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did had sent her away.

'How cruel of you to send her away,' Tom sobbed. 'But I will find her again, yes, even if I go to the world's end to look for her.'

The ugly fairy did not slap Tom and tell him to hold his tongue. Instead she took him on her lap and told him that he had been in the nursery long enough. He must go out now and see the world if he intended ever to be a man. And he must go by himself and see with his own eyes and make his own mistakes.

But there were many fine things to be seen in the world, she

told him. It was an odd, curious and on the whole pleasant place if people would only be reasonably brave and honest and good in it. No harm would come to him if he remembered his lessons and did what he knew was right.

'If only I might see Ellie once before I went!' Tom said. 'I should be much happier if I thought she had forgiven me.'

And in the twinkling of an eye there stood Ellie, smiling and looking so happy he longed to kiss her.

'I'm going, Ellie,' he said, 'but I don't like going at all, and that's the truth.'

'Pooh, pooh!' said the fairy. 'At the bottom of your heart you know you'll like it. But come here with me and see what happens to people who only do that which is pleasant.'

And she took him to one of her cupboards and took out a book with pictures. It was called: 'The History of the famous nation of the Do-as-you-likes, who came away from the country of Hardwork.'

In the first picture Tom saw the Do-as-you-likes living in the land of Readymade at the foot of the Happy-go-lucky Mountains. They lived a pleasant, lazy life. They were fond of music, but it was too much trouble to learn the piano or the violin. As for dancing, that was too much exercise. They sat under the trees and under the vines and squeezed the sweet grape juice down their throats. Little pigs ran about, ready-roasted, crying: 'Come and eat me.'

They needed no weapons, for no enemies ever came near their land. And no tools, for everything was ready-made.

'What a jolly life!' said Tom.

'You think so?' said the fairy. 'Do you see the smoke coming out of that great peaked mountain behind, and the ashes and cinders about? Let's turn over the next five hundred years and see what happens next.'

She turned the pages of the book. And the mountain had blown up and boiled over like a kettle. A third of the Do-as-you-likes were blown into the air, another third were smothered in the ashes, and there was only one-third left.

She turned over another five hundred years. There they were, what was left of the Do-as-you-likes, still doing just as they liked. They were too lazy to move away from the mountain. So they said: 'If the mountain has blown up once, that's all the more reason why it shouldn't blow up again. And if there are fewer of us all the merrier: there will be more for us to eat.'

But that wasn't quite true. For they had already eaten all the roast pigs and now they lived very hard—on nuts and roots scratched from the ground. They had forgotten how to plough and sow corn as their ancestors used to do.

'Why, they're growing no better than savages,' Tom said.

'And look how ugly they are getting,' said Ellie.

The fairy turned over another five hundred years. And now they were all living up in trees and making nests to keep out the rain. Underneath the trees lions prowled about.

'Why,' Ellie cried, 'the lions seem to have eaten many of them, there are so few left.'

'Only the strongest can climb the trees and so escape,' the fairy said.

'They are as rough a lot as I ever saw,' Tom said.



She took him to one of the cupboards and took out a book

When she had turned over another five hundred years they were rougher and stronger still — and much fewer. Their feet had changed shape very oddly so that they could hold on to branches with their big toes.

'There's a hairy one among them!' Ellie said in surprise.

'Ah,' the fairy said, 'that will soon be the chief of all the tribe.'

And, sure enough, when she turned the pages again, the hairy chief had hairy children. The climate was growing so damp that all the ones without hair coughed and sneezed and had sore throats and died before they could grow into men and women.

She turned another five hundred years and there were fewer still.

'Why, they can't even stand upright,' Ellie said.

'They are all apes!' cried Tom.

'Something very like apes,' the fairy said sadly. 'They have grown so stupid now they can hardly think, for they haven't used their brains for hundreds of years.'

And in the next five hundred years they were all dead and gone, except one huge old fellow with jaws like a jack-knife. A hunter came up and shot him while he roared and thumped his chest. He remembered that his ancestors had once been men and tried to say: 'Don't shoot, am I not a man and a brother?' but he had forgotten how to use his tongue. Then he tried to call for a doctor, but he had forgotten the word for doctor. So all he said was: 'Ubbobooo!' and died.

And that was the end of the great and jolly nation of the Do-as-you-likes.

When the book was closed Tom and Ellie looked very solemn. At last Ellie said to the fairy:

'But couldn't you have saved them from becoming apes?'

'At first, my dear,' she said. 'If only they would have behaved like men and set to work to do what they did not like to do. The longer they waited, and behaved like dumb beasts that only do as they like, the stupider and clumsier they grew. At last they were past all curing. It is such things as these that make me unhappy and so ugly. You, too, Tom, came very near to being turned into a beast once or twice. Indeed, if you had not made up your mind to go on this journey and see the world, like

an Englishman, I think you might have ended up as a newt in a pond.'

'Sooner than that,' Tom said, 'I'll go to the world's end — this minute!'

* * * * *

'You are a brave, good boy,' said the fairy to Tom. 'But you must go farther than the world's end if you want to find Mr. Grimes. For he is at the Other-end-of-Nowhere. You must find Mother Carey and she will tell you the way.'

'Who is Mother Carey?'

'Mother Carey is the mother of all the wild birds who live in the Northern Oceans, the stormy petrels which sailors call Mother Carey's chickens.'

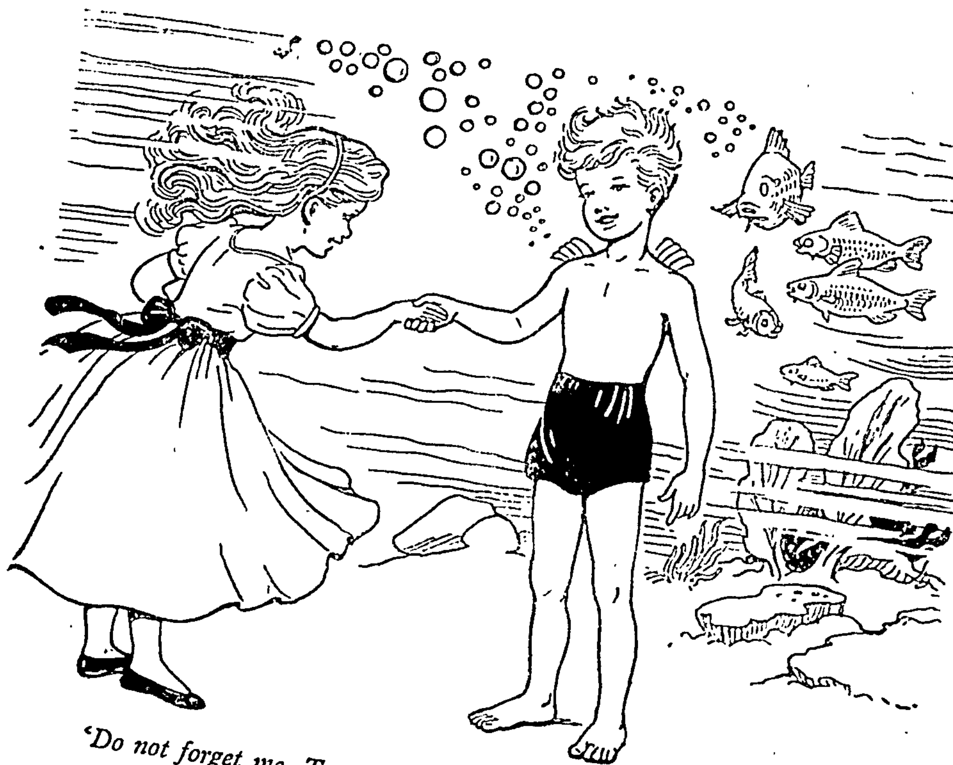
'But how shall I find her?' Tom asked.

'That I can't tell you, my dear. Little boys must take the trouble to find out things for themselves if they wish to become men. You must ask the beasts of the sea and the birds of the air.'

'Well,' said Tom, 'it will be a long journey, so I'd better start at once. Good-bye, Miss Ellie. You know I am getting to be a big boy and I must go out and see the world.'

'I know you must,' Ellie said, 'but do not forget me, Tom. I shall wait here till you come back.'

He promised and shook her hand, though he very much wished to kiss her. But his head was so full of the adventures before him that he forgot all bout Ellie five minutes after-



'Do not forget me, Tom. I shall wait here till you come back'

wards. That is, his head forgot about her, but his heart did not.

So Tom asked the way from his friends the fishes, but they ouldn't help him, for he was still too far down South. On his ay north he met a ship, a gallant ocean-liner with a long trail f smoke behind it. He watched the sailors and the passengers n the deck, but none of them could see him because their eyes ere not opened — as, indeed, most people's are not.

At last he saw on the deck a very pretty lady with a baby in arms. And the baby saw Tom. Tom was sure of it, for the y smiled and held out its hands as though it wanted to leap rboard, and swim to him.

Tom journeyed northwards again, day after day, till at last he met the King of the Herrings who had a sprat in his mouth for a cigar. And he sent Tom onwards.

After seven days and seven nights there came swooping over him a flock of petrels, flitting about like black swallows and whistling to each other so tenderly that Tom fell in love with them at once and asked them the way.

'To Mother Carey?' they said. 'We are Mother Carey's own chickens and she sends us out over the sea to show the good birds the way home.'

Tom was delighted and swam after them. As Tom and the petrels went north-eastward it began to blow harder and harder. Tom swam faster and the birds went over the crests of the billows as merry as flying-fish.

Then they saw a tragic sight — the black side of a great steamship which had sunk in the storm. Tom scrambled on board, for it was the same steamship he had met many days before. And in a little cot he found the same baby that had smiled at him. Beside it a little terrier dog barked and barked. But the baby still smiled, even when the cot floated from the shipwreck and sailed away on the waves.

Then the fairies from down below came up and took the baby and Tom knew it was all right. There would now be a new baby in St. Brandan's Isle.

And the poor little terrier? Why, he jumped right out of his skin and became a water-dog, and he followed Tom the whole way to the Other-end-of-Nowhere.

They came to a great ice-wall through which there was no



He jumped right out of his skin and became a water-dog

way to pass. The birds flew over it, but Tom and the water-dog had to swim underneath. They swam on in black darkenss at the bottom of the sea for seven days and seven nights until at last they came up somewhere near the North Pole.

And there they found a large pool, miles and miles across, where men had never been. All around it rose ice cliffs with shining walls and sparkling spires. There live the ice-fairies who drive away the storms and clouds so that Mother Carey's pool is calm from year's end to year's end.

And to Mother Carey's pool come all the good beasts of the sea to swim and play when they grow old, the whales and dol-

phins and seals. Tom found Mother Carey herself sitting on an iceberg like a white marble throne. From the foot of her throne there swam away, out and into the sea, millions of newborn creatures, of more shapes and colours than man ever dreamed. They were Mother Carey's children, whom she makes out of the sea-water all day long.

She looked at Tom very kindly and said: 'What do you want, my little man? It is a long time since I have seen a water-baby here.'

Tom told her his errand and asked the way to the Other-end-of-Nowhere.

'You ought to know yourself,' she said, 'because you have been there already.'

'Have I, ma'am? I'm sure I cannot remember.'

'Then look at me.'

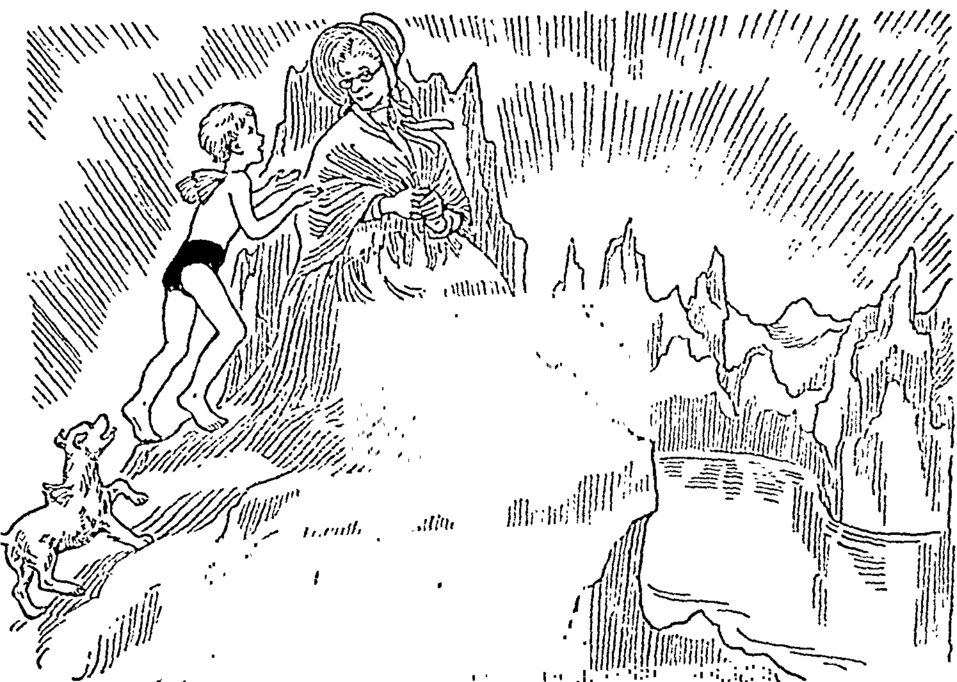
Tom looked into her old blue eyes and remembered the way perfectly. But when he looked away again he quite forgot. He told her he could not remember unless he looked at her, and she smiled.

'You must do without me, Tom,' she said, 'as most people have to for the nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandth part of their lives. You must go the whole way backward.'

'Backward!' cried Tom. 'But I shan't be able to see my way.'

'On the contrary, of you look forward, you will not see a step before you, but if you look behind you you can't go wrong. You'll know what is coming next as plainly as if you saw it in a looking-glass.'

* * * * *



'What do you want, my little man?'

So Tom went back, guided by his little dog, and reached the Other-end-of-Nowhere. When he got there he found to his surprise that it was very like This-End-of-Somewhere. On the way he had many and strange adventures. For instance, he went through waste-paper-land, where he saw all the stupid books and silly magazines in the world lying in great heaps. He visited the country where ploughs draw horses, nails hit hammers, bulls keep china-shops, in short where everyone does what he has been taught not to do. He saw the Land of Hearsay where everyone was repeating things they didn't know anything about to everyone else.

At last, after countless adventures, he stopped before a big building with tall chimneys, wondering if Mr. Grimes might not be inside it. Suddenly he heard shouts of 'Stop!' and he saw running towards him three or four policemen's truncheons. They were running along by themselves without legs or arms!

'Why have you no policemen to carry you?' Tom asked in astonishment.

'Because we are not like those clumsy truncheons in the land-world which cannot go about without a whole man to carry them.'

'Then why have you got a thong to your handle?' Tom said.

'To hang ourselves up by, of course, when we are off duty.'

Mr. Grimes was in the building, up chimney No. 345, they told Tom. And sure enough, there he was, with his head and shoulders sticking out, grumbling because his pipe would not light. When he saw Tom he growled:

'I suppose you've come here to laugh at me, you spiteful little boy.'

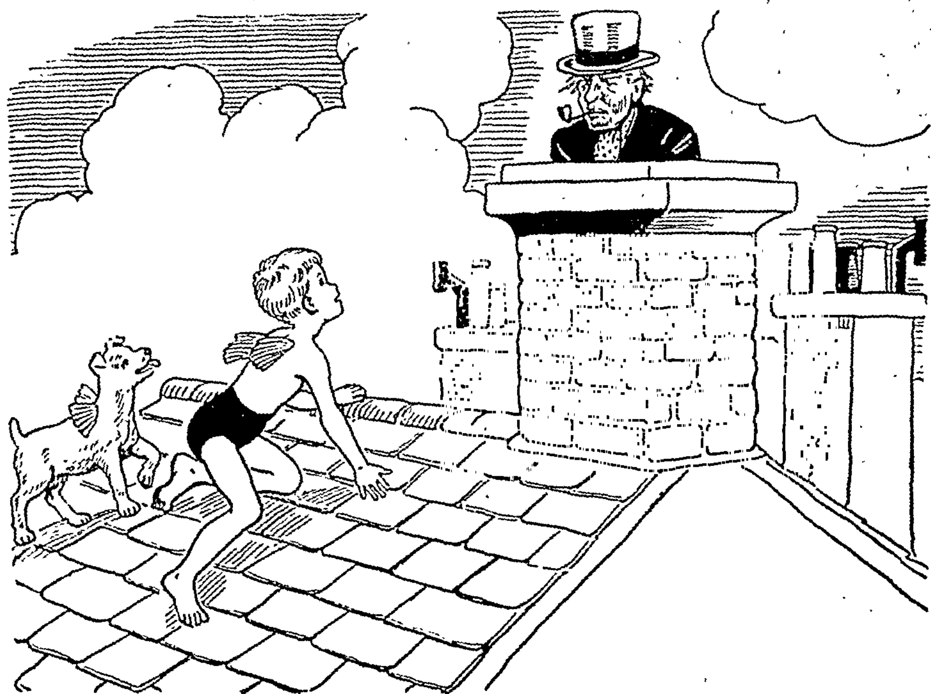
Tom assured him that he had not, but only wanted to help him.

'No,' said the truncheon, 'Grimes has come to the place where everybody has to help himself.'

'Did I ask to be brought to this prison?' Grimes grumbled. 'Did I ask to be beaten and made to sweep your dirty chimneys?'

'No,' answered a solemn voice behind. 'No more did Tom when you made him do the same thing.'

It was Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did!



Sure enough, there he was, with his head and shoulders sticking out

Tom bowed to her when he had got over his surprise and said: 'Oh, ma'am, don't think about me. That's all past and done with. But please may I not help poor Mr. Grimes?'

'You may try, of course,' she said.

So Tom pulled and tugged at the bricks to help Mr. Grimes get free from the chimney in which he was stuck, but he could not move one of them. He wiped Mr. Grimes's face, but the black soot wouldn't come off.

'Better leave me alone,' Grimes said. 'You are a good-natured, forgiving little chap, and that's the truth. Besides, it's beginning to hail.'

'That isn't hail,' Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did said. 'It's your own mother's tears, Grimes, which your cold heart froze into hail when you left her in the schoolhouse in Vendale and picked up your bad ways.'

The kind old woman at Vendale who had given Tom a glass of milk was Grimes's mother. Grimes was sorry for his past life. And as he looked at Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did he saw that she was the same Irishwoman they had met that first morning on the road to Harthover who had warned him.

And because Tom asked forgiveness for him, she told the truncheons to take Grimes away and give him his ticket of leave.

'And what is he to do, ma'am?' the truncheons asked.

'Get him to sweep out the crater of Mount Etna,' she said.

And for all I know Mr. Grimes is still to this day sweeping the cinders from the volcano which is called Mount Etna.

'And now,' said the fairy to Tom, 'your work here is done. You may as well go back again.'

She bandaged his eyes so that he never knew how he got away from the Other-end-of-Nowhere. The first thing Tom saw when he took the bandage off was St. Brandan's Isle reflected in the broad silver sea. The wind sang softly in the cedars and the water sang among the caves.

But one song came across the water sweeter than all of these; the song of a young girl's voice. As Tom neared the island there sat upon a rock the loveliest and most graceful creature he had ever seen. It was Ellie.

'Oh, Miss Ellie,' said Tom, 'how you have grown up!'



'Oh, Miss Ellie,' said Tom, 'how you have grown up!'

'You, too, have grown up, Tom,' she said.

For they had both grown up — he into a tall man, she into a beautiful woman. They stood looking at each other so long that at first they didn't hear the fairy saying to them:

'Attention, children. Aren't you going to look at *me*?'

They looked — and both of them cried out at once: 'Who are you, after all?'

'You are our dear Mrs. Do-as-you-would-be-done-by,' Ellie said.

'No, you are our good Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did,' said Tom. 'But you have grown quite beautiful.'

'To you,' said the fairy. 'But look again.'

'You are Mother Carey, but you are grown quite young again.'

'To you,' said the fairy. 'But look again.'

'You are the Irishwoman who met me the day I went to Harthover!'

And when Tom looked she was none of them, yet all of them at once.

'You may take him home with you now on Sundays, Ellie,' she said. 'Because Tom has won his spurs in the great battle and become worthy to go with you and be a man — because he has done the thing he did not like.'

So Tom went home with Ellie on Sundays and sometimes on weekdays too. And Tom is now a great man of science and can plan railways and build bridges and steamships, and he knows everything about everything.

Or at least *nearly* everything.

And all of this he learned from being a water-baby under the sea.

'And, of course, he married Ellie?'

My dear child, what a silly notion! Don't you know that no one ever marries in a fairy tale, under the rank of a prince or a princess?

'And what happened to Tom's dog?'

Oh, you may see him any clear night in July; for the *old* dog-star was so worn out by the last three hot summers that there have been no dog-days since. So they have taken the old dog-star down and put Tom's dog up, in his place. Therefore, as

new brooms sweep clean — or so they say — we may hope for some warm weather this year.

And that is the end of my story.

But remember always, as I told you in the beginning, that this is all a fairy-tale, and only told for fun. Therefore you are not to believe a word of it — [illegible] it is true!